CLARENCE.

BY BRET HARTE.

Author of "The Luck of Roaring | The girl sweetheart he was then g

Camp," Two Men of Sandy Bar," etc.

PART I.

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CHAPTER II.

The laugh that instictively broke from Charence's lips was so sincere and manifected that the man was disconcerted, and at last joined in it, a little shamefacedly. The grotesque blunder of being taken as a fuglifive from justice relieved Charence's mind from its acute tension, he was momentarily diverted, and it was not until the boatman had departed and he was again shone that it seemed to have any collateral significance.

Then an uneasy recollection of Susy's threat that she had the power to put his wife in Fort Alcatraz came across him.

Could she have already warned the municipal authorities and this manbut be quickly remembered any action from such a warning could only have been taken by the United States marshal, and not by an active official, and dismissed the idea.

Nevertheless, when the stage with

A quick and searching glance from the stranger's eye made him regret it, but in the silence that ensued the red-bearded passenger, evidently still rankling at heart, saw his opportunity.

Slapping his huge hands on his knees and learning forward, until he seemed to plunge his fiaming beard—like a firebrand—into the controversy, he raid, grimly:

"Well! I kin tell you gen'l'men, this! It ain't goin' to be no matter wot's state's rights and wot's fed'ral rights—it ain't goin' to be no matter wot's state's rights and wot's fed'ral rights—the gov'ment's got the right to relieve its own soldiers that those secesh is besieging in Fort Sumter or whether they haven't—but the first gun that's fired at the flag blows the chains off every d—n nigger south of Mason and Dixon's line! You hear me! I'm shoutin'!

There was an angry start in one or two of the seats. One man caught at the swinging side strap and half rose, and then all as suddenly subsided.

Every eye was turned to an insignificant figure in the back seat. It was a woman holding a child on her lap and gazing out of the window with her seen's prefund unoverern in tollows.

Every eye was turned to an insig-milicant figure in the back seat. It was a woman holding a child on her tap and gazing out of the window with her sex's profound unconcern in poli-

Clarence understood the rude chiv Clarence understood the rude chivalry of the road well enough to comprehend that this unconscious but omnipotent figure had, more than once that day, controlled the passions of the disputants. They dropped back weakly to their seats and their mutterings roued off in the rattle of the wheels. Clarence glanced at the Missourian, the was regarding the red-hearded miner with a singular curiosity.

The rain had ceased, but the afternoon shadows were desponing when

noun shadows were deepening when they at last reached Fair Plains, where Clarence expected to take a horse to the rancho. He was astonished, however, to learn that all the noises in stable were engaged, but remembering that some of his own stock were in pasturage with a tenant at Fair Plains, and that he should probably have a better selection, he turned his steps

this evident avoidance of him was sigthis evident avoidance of him was sig-nificant. Perhaps his reputation as a doubtful Unionist had preceded him, but this would not account for their conduct in a district so strongly south-ern in sympathy as Fair Plains.

More impressed by the occurrence han be cared to admit, when at last, a ter seme delay, he had secured his house and was once more in the saddle, he kept a sharp lookout for his quon-dam companion.

he kept a sharp lookout for his quondam companion.

But here another circumstance added to his guspicions; there was a main road ledding to Santa Inex, the next town, and the rancho, and this Clarenceence had purposely taken in order to watch the Missourian—but there was a cat-off directly to the rancho, known only to habitues of the rancho.

After a few moments rapid tiding on a mustang much superior to any in the hotel stables, he was satisfied that the stranger must have taken the out-off. Putting spurs to his horse, he trusted still to precede him to the funcho—if that was his destination.

As he dashed along the familiar road, by a strange preversity of famey, has been dashed that the strange perversity of famey, has been dashed along the familiar road, by a strange perversity of famey, has been dashed that the suranger must have taken the found himself recalling the first time the had ridden that was his destination.

As he dashed along the familiar road, by a strange preversity of famey, has been dashed to suit when the sound of voices convinced him that his conjecture was right, and the meeting was gathered on the broad balconies around the patio.

He knew that a narrow gallery, has been dark the sound of voices convinced him that his conjecture was right, and the meeting was gathered on the broad balconies around the patio.

He knew that a narrow gallery, has been dark the source of the strange noises that had been heard there.

The door leading to the corridor was lightly bolted, merely to keep it from ratiling in the wino. Slipping the bolt with the side of his pocket brife, he had the source of the strange noises that had been heard there.

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shal, and not by an active official, and dismissed the idea.

Nevertheless, when the stage with its half-spent lamps still burning dimly against the morning light swept round the curve and rolled heavily up to the rude shanty which served as coach office, he became watchful.

A single yawning individual in its dogrwny received a few letters and parcels, but Clarence was evidently the only wailing passenger. Any hope that he might have entertained that his mysterious predecessor would emerge from some scolusion at that moment was disappointed.

As he entered the coach he made a rapid survey of his fellow travellers, but satisfied himself that the stranger was not among them. They were mainly small traders, or farmers, a miner or two, and apparently a Spanish-American of beiter degree and personality.

Possibly the circumstance that men of this class usually preferred to travel

possibly the circumstance that men of this class usually preferred to travel on horseback and were rarely seen in public conveyances attracted his attention, and their eyes met more than once, in mutual curlosity.

Presently Clarence addressed a remark to him in Spanish. He replied fluently and courageously, but at the next stopping place he asked a question of the expressman, in an unmistakable Missouri accent.

Ing of night, his nervous feverishness was again invaded and benumbed by sullen memories. There was the open-ing the travel of the the open-ing the ranch of orever—where he had first clasped her in his arms, and stayed; a turn of the head, a moment's indecision, a single glance of a languorous eye had brought this culmination.

And now he stood again before that ruined grille, his house and lands, even

mext stopping place he asked a question of the expressman, in an unmistakable Missouri accept.

Clarence's curiosity was satisfied; he was evidently one of those early American settlers who had been so long domiciled in southern California as to adopt the speech as well as the habilities of the Spaniara.

The conversation fell upon the political news of the previous night, or rather seemed to be lazily continued from some previous more excited discussion, in which one of the contest-stats, a red-bearded miner, had subsided into an occasional growl of surly disgent.

It struck Clarence that the Missourian had been an amused auditor, and ever, judging from a twinkle in his cye, a mischievous instigator of the controversy. He was not surprised, therefore, when the man turned to him with a certain courtesy and said:

"And what, sir, is the political feeting in your district?"

But Clarence was in no mood to be drawn, and replied, almost curity, that as he had come only from. San Francisco, they were probably as well informed on that subject as himself.

A quick and searching glance from the stranger's eye made him regret it, but in the silence that ensued the red-bearded passenger, evidently still rank.



"Until I Have a Word With

But these recollections no longer de-layed him; the moment for action had arrived. He knew that since the tragedy the bouldor had been dis-mantied and shunned; the servants believed it to be haunted by the assassin's ghost.

With the aid of the passion vine the ingress was case. The interior window

to him.

Occupying a characteristically central position was the famous Colone! Starbottle, of Virginia, launty and youthful looking in his mask-like, beardless face, expressive and dignified in his middle-aged port and carriage, he alone retained something of the importance—albeit slightly theatrical and affected—of the occasion. Charence, in his first hurried glance, had not observed his wife, and for a moment had felt relieved.

But as Colonel Starbottle arose at

But as Colonel Starbottle arose at that moment, and with a studiously chivalrous and courtly manner turned to his right, he saw that she was sit-ling at the farther end of the balcony, and that a man whom he recognized a Captain Pinckney was standing beside

The blood quickly tightened around his heart, but left him cold and observant.

was seldom, Indeed, It was seldom, Indeed, remarked Colonel Starbottle, placing his fat white fingers in the frill of his shirt front, that a movement like this was graced with the actual presence of a lofty, inspiring, yet delicate spirit—a Boadicea—indeed, he night say a Joan of Arc—in the person of their charming hostess, Mrs. Brant!

Not only were they favored by her

in the person of their charming hostess, Mrs. Brant!

Not only were they favored by her social and hospitable ministration, but by her active and enthusiastic co-operation in the glorious work they had in hand. It was through her correspondence and earnest advocacy that they were to be favored tonight with the aid and counsel of one of the most dis-

were to be favored tonight with the aid and counsel of one of the most distinguished and powerful men in the southern district of California, Judge Beeswinger, of Los Angeles.

He had not the honor of that gentleman's personal acquaintance; he believed he was not far wrong in saying that this was also the misfortune of every gentleman present, but the name itself was a tower of strength. He would go further and say that Mes itself was a tower of strength. He would go further and say that Mrs. Brant herself was personally unacquainted with him, but that it was through the fervor, poetry, grose and genius of her correspondence with that

Marence well remembered. "The judg was to arrive by the coach from Mar inez to Fair Plains, and is due now." tinez to Fair Plains, and is due now."
"But is there no gentleman to introduce him? Must we take him on the
word of a common trader—by Jove, a
whisky seller" continued the previous
voice sneeringly.
"On the word of a lady, Mr. Brooks,"
said Captain Pinckney, with a slight
gesture toward Mrs. Brant, "who answers for both."
Clarence had started slightly at his
wife's voice and the information it con-

wife's voice and the information it conveyed. His fellow passenger and the confidant of MacNiel was the man they were expecting. If they had recognized him (Clarence), would they not have warned the company of his proximity? He held his breath as the sound of voices came from the outer gate of the courtyard. Mrs. Brant rose, but at the same moment the gate swung open and a man entered. It was the Missourian. wife's voice and the information it con-

sourian.

He turned with an old-fashioned couriesy to the single woman standing on the balcony. "My fair correspondent, I believe! I am Judge Beeswinger. Your agent, MacNiel, passed me through your guards at the gate, but I did not deem it advisable to bring him into this assembly of gentlemen without your further consideration. rust I was right"

trust I was right."

The quiet dignity and self-possession, the quaint, old-fashioned colonial precision of speech, modified by a soft Virginian intonation, and, above all, some singular individuality in the man himself, produced a profound sensation and seemed to suddenly give the gathering an impressiveness it had lacked before.

lacked before

For an instant Clarence forgot himself and his personal wrongs in the shock of indignation he fell at this potent addition to the ranks of his enemies. He saw his wife's eyes sparkle with pride over her acquisition, and noticed that Pinckney cast a disturbed glance at the newcomer.

The stranger ascended the few steps to the balcony and took Mrs. Brant's

glance at the newcomer.

The stranger ascended the few steps to the balcony and took Mrs. Brant's hand with profound couriesy.

"Introduce me to my celleagues—distinctly and separately. It behoaves a man at such a moment to know to whom he intrusts his life and honor, and the life and honor of his cause."

It was evidently no mere formal couriesy of the stranger. As he stepped forward along the balcony, and under Mrs. Brant's graceful guidance was introduced to each of the members, he not only listened with scrupulous care and attention to the name and profession of each man, but bent upon him a clear, searching glance that seemed to photograph him in his memory, with two exceptions.

He passed Colonel Starbottle's expanding shirt frill with a bow of elaborate precision and said: "Colonel Starbottle's fame requires neither introduction nor explanation." He stopped before Capitala Pincinney and paused.

"An officer of the United States army, I believe, sir."

"Yes."

"Educated at West Point, I think, by the government, to whom you have

"Educated at West Point, I think, by the government, to whom you have taken the oath of allegiance?"

"Yes." "Very good, sir," said the stranger, very good, st., said the stranger, turning away.

"You have forgotten one other fact, sir," said Pinckney, with a slightly supercillous air.

"Indeed, what is it?"

"Indeed, what is K."
"I am first of all, a native of the state of South Carolina."
A murmur of applause and approval ran round the balcony. Captain Pinckiney amiled and exchanged glances with Mrs. Brant, but the stranger quietly re-

tween their slais, himself invisible, he could hear and see everything that occurred.

Yet even at this supreme moment the first thing that struck him was the almost ludicrous contrast between the appearance of the meeting and its appearance of the meeting and its trucked by any previous boylest.

Whether he was influenced by any previous boylest conception of a cloudy and gloomy conspiracy he did not know, but he was for an instant almost disconcerted by the appearance leaves of the beleasured guilety of the conclave Decanters and glasses stood on small tables before them; nearly all were drinking and smoking.

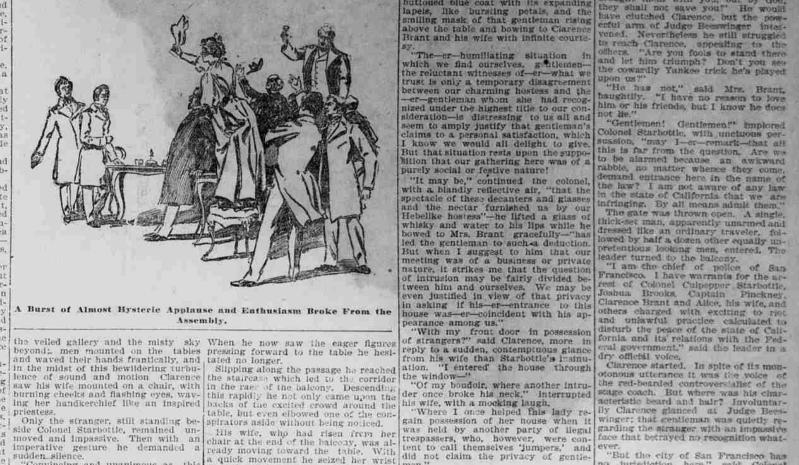
They comprised fifteen or twenty men, some whose faces were familiar to him.

Occupying a characteristically central rable beside could hear and see everything that occurred.

"Colone) Starbottile.

"I am not only an anexpected delevant specified delevant specified delevant struckian as he rose to his feet watt Kentuckian as he rose to his feet watt Kentuckian as he rose to his feet watt Kentuckian as he rose to his feet with eyez fixed on Clarence. "They comprise a specified by the appearant to here?" continued Juage Beeawinger, watt Kentuckian as he rose to his feet with eyez fixed on Clarence. "They comprise a specified by the appearant to here?" continued Juage Beeawinger, watt Kentuckian as he rose to his feet with eyez fixed on Clarence. "They comprise a specified on the formation wat suggested with same against the gateway, "Ill shoot the first back man, the began as greatening and stroke down the steps to his feet watt Kentuckian as he rose to his feet. "Thave given rou all the information." They cown appearance of the meeting and the specified on the first hands to dispatches and stroke down the steps to the patio. "For." he added, placing his back man, the guilt shoult he paid. They had been a specified as and stroke down the steps to his feet watt Kentuckian as he rose to his feet watt Kentuckian has trook on the first back and stroke out now."

They comprised fifteen or twenty and specified



ing her handkerchief like an inspired priestess.

Only the stranger, still standing beside Colonel Starbottle, remained unmoved and impassive. Then with an imperative gesture he demanded a sudden silence.

"Convincing and unanimous as this demonstration is, gentlemen," he began quietly, "It is my duty, nevrtheless, to ask you if you have scriously considered the meaning of the news I have brought. It means the clash of arms between two sections of a mighty country, it means the disruption of friends,

would go further and say that Mrs.

Brant herself, was personally unactive stranger, still standing be side Colonel Starbottle, remained may be side of the side of the

ment."

It was the voice of Colonel Starbottle: it was the frilled shirt front, the lightly buttoned blue coat with its expanding lapels, like bursing petals, and the smilling mask of that gentleman rising above the table and bowing to Clarence Brant and his wife with infinite courters.

"The—er—humiliating situation in which we find ourselves, guitlementhe rejuctant witnesses of—er—what we trust is only a temporary disagreement between our charming hostess and the—er—gentleman whom she had recognized under the highest title to our consideration—is distressing to us all and seem to amply justify that gentleman's claims to a personal satisfaction, which I know we would all delight to give. But that situation rests upon the supposition that our gathering here was of a purely social or festive nature!

"A compact?" echoed Mrs. Brast with a bitter langh. "Yes? the compact that binds South Carolina to Massachusette! The compact that links logether white and black, the gentleman and the trader—the planter and the poor white—the compact of those United States—Eath!—that has been broken, and so can this?"

Chrence's face paled. But before he could speak, there was a rapid clattering at the gate and a dismounted voquero entered excitedly. Turning to Mrs. Brant, he said furriedly.

"The casa is surrounded by a rabble of mounted men, and there is one among them even now who demands admittance in the name of the law."

"This is your work." said Brooks, facing Chrence furiously. "you have brought them with you, but by God, they shall not save you!" He would have clutched Charence, but the powerful arm of Judge Beeswinger intervened. Nevertheless he still struggled to reach Charence, appealing to the others. "Are you fools to stand there and let him triumph? Don't you see the cowardly Yunkee trick he's played upon us?"

"He has not," said Mrs. Brant,

"He has not," said Mrs. Beant, hanghelly. "I have no reason to love him or his friends, but I know he does not lie."

"Gentlemen!" Gentlemen!" implored Colonel Starbottle, with unchoose persuasion, "may I—er—remark—that all this is far from the question. Are we to be alarmed because an awkward rabble, no matter whence they come, fernand entrance here in the name of the law?

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